DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 075 343 SP 006 045

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| AUTHOR | Lawson, Robert F. |
| TITLE | Discrimination and Integration in the Foundations of Education. |
| PUB DATE | May 72 |
| NOTE | 12p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the Learned Societies in Canada, McGill University, May, 1972 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29 |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Educational Needs; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; *Foundations of Education; *Opinions |

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the basis and organizational rationale for Foundations of Education courses. Instructional objectives for Foundations courses are included. The unity and effectiveness of Foundations fields are studied in light of the viability of integrated work and study in the Foundations. (MJM)

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# DISCRIMINATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION*

Robert F. Lawson

Justifications for Foundations efforts in teaching and research are abundant and readers of this article are likely to be thoroughly familiar with them. It may help in the communication of my own conviction, however, if brief comment is made on the importance of Foundations studies. In spite of some disparaging remarks about "Foundations courses," there is a clearly observable plea for the substance of Foundations study in almost every discussion of problems and policies which takes place in the field of education. One does not have to follow a discussion on education among teachers, board members, government officials, or the general public for very long before finding the participants engaged in questions of "how it came to be that way," whether the terms are commonly defined, what has been done about it elsewhere, or how to identify the pertinent social causes. That we have not been able to communicate effectively with those directly involved in coping with educational problems cannot lead to the faulty conclusion that the subject of our studies is unimportant or irrelevant.

Beyond this reminder, I merely defer to authorities like W. O. Stanley, Israel Scheffler, Paul Hirst, who have addressed the question directly, or to others who have answered it implicitly in their work, such

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*This paper was presented at the Conference of the Learned Societies in Canada, McGill University, in May, 1972.



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as Saul Robinsohn, C. Arnold Anderson, and Lawrence Cremin. Three specific works may be cited, however, which from different frames of reference, clearly stipulate the essential relationship of Foundations study to the tasks of professional education. First, among a number of statements applying more or less directly to the Foundational base of educational study contained in the Harvard report on Graduate Study in Education, this sentence is perhaps the most inclusive:

> It is supremely important for the professional educator to acquire not merely the practical skills requisite to his work, but the ability to grasp such work as a subject of intellectual criticism, and the capacity to understand certain of its general ramifications.[1]

Second, in their attempt to design a new teacher education program more appropriate to social realities in the United States, the NDEA Institute for Advanced Study in Teaching Disadvantaged Youth produced a report, whose operational recommendations are based on a theoretical preparation which assumes the competencies of specialists in Foundations fields. The authors have said that specific practical improvements rest on 1) a systematic study of the pedagogically relevant aspects of the particular social context of the school, and 2) on the relevant aspects of knowledge theory.[2] In effect, they have, by specifically integrating conceptual learning and the study of socio-cultural phenomena with the conduct of education, re-stated the rationale for what may be considered the historical accident of our professional unity.

Third, in a broader study of education's place and tasks in the society it seeks to serve, Solon Kimball and James McClellan have articulated the rat-in-maze behavior which confounds and misdirects efforts to make education meaningful for the modern world.

> The educationists . . . have, for very understandable reasons, dodged and twisted in an attempt to escape the enormous responsibility that the . . . people have put on their schools. They have specialized their functions; they have taken refuge in technical progress without concern for the ends to be served by the techniques; they have worked themselves and their students harder and harder, without considering whether the work has genuine significance or not.[3]

They conclude that this abuse of our public trust, however understandable, can only be avoided if we are able to integrate our professional efforts through a "philosophy of education appropriate to our times." This sense of "philosophy of education" is not that of a single discipline, but of that translation of cultural content and educational theory into a base of fundamental ideas, purposes, and principles of application which is precisely the rationale for Foundations studies, and for their uneasy institutional integration.

Now, to admit of a rationale for the field, and to extend this rationale to university organization says nothing about what we actually do or how effectively we do it. We can come down to a next level of organizational rationale by attending to the instructional objectives we can agree upon collectively. These might include:

1. Stimulating the student to examine the meaning and purpose of education in a society, and to use that understanding in the consideration of given problems or school situations.
2. Using an intellectual medium to induct the prospective teacher into his professional community (as Scheffler has put it, attempting to "get others on the inside of a public form of life that [one] shares and considers worthwhile.")
3. More specifically, providing students the opportunity

to learn--

a) how education came to be as it is, how conflicts were resolved and what decision-making pattern resulted.

b) what an educational problem is and what it includes, how to classify it as one of a type, how to determine grounds and to utilize evidence.

c) what functions are assigned to and performed by institutions and relevant groups in the conduct of education, what relationships pertain among institutions, groups, and persons in and affecting education.

d) what are the contemporary alternatives to educational thought, practice, and organization, what criteria may be used to evaluate these in their own particular framework and in their effect on educational development generally.

These statements bring us no closer to the thorny problems of unity and effectiveness of the Foundations fields however; in fact, they may only give us a false comfort. If the question of the viability of integrated work and study in the Foundations (i.e., the viability of a Foundations course, a Foundations department, a Foundations degree) is to be seriously confronted, we must ask ourselves some painfully specific questions. Granting that there is no sameness about the content, the methodology, or the applicability of the various Foundations fields, that is, granting that they are separate fields of study, the questions are whether there is complementarity among the bodies of content, compatability

among methodologies, and similarity in the boundaries laid between theory and policy or practice.

These questions could be pursued toward the end of establishing the proper institutional place of the several Foundations fields or disciplines. This would, in my opinion, lead us nowhere. The expansion of knowledge, and the consequent specialization of methods and areas of concern within a rather static institutional organization has made questionable the integrity of almost every unit in the university. It would be of absolutely no value to attempt to rationalize the place of Foundations in an otherwise irrational structure. In short, that attempt could only be made within the framework of a total university re-organization which would leave few existent units intact. Since this paper is confined to the narrower subject, and since the larger reorganization is unlikely to be taken seriously by anyone in the near future, the institutional question can only be dismissed as arbitrary. Foundations disciplines can be placed together or not, can constitute a unit or units, or be within another unit, and it will not make more or less sense institutionally.

Since there is normally a Foundations unit within a school of education however, that organizational answer may be taken as given. What then are the functional answers to the questions posed above? Those answers will rest here on a premise of academic responsibility which requires that we do individually what we have become convinced is worthwhile doing and that we do this in the way we are individually best equipped to do it. Given the wide range of content and method differences among the Foundations fields which that statement legitimizes, the next step might be to conclude that differences will be substantial, inevitable, and irreconcilable, and simply leave it at that. This would in no way minimize the important

contributions to be made particularly by the respective fields. To some extent, I will maintain that permissive, separatist position--but it is possible to go somewhat further toward integration by considering how, where, and on what basis Foundations activities can come together to enhance individual scholarly productivity, instructional impact, and the usefulness of these activities to public education in society.

Where these activities might come together has been suggested in the foregoing statements on rationale--that is, in teacher education and the graduate study of education,--as information, analytic skills, and induction into the professional way of life; in society studies generally, where the inclusion of education as a significant institution needs to be emphasized; in the provision of research essential to fundamental policy decisions; and in the communication of information to and designation of critical policy questions for the public.

How is a more difficult question, but certain suggestions might apply to each of the locations. In regard to the Foundations contribution to public participation in educational decisions, a beginning might be made by clarifying that contribution and its limitation. That is, we might give up the pretense, promoted by our organizational unity and place in an "applied" faculty, that we can professionally offer answers, especially synthetic solutions. At the same time, it is imperative to sharpen and communicate to the public the social and conceptual grounds and predictive statements, which are derived from research in the respective Foundations fields, and which are selected by the researcher to be relevant to particular educational actions.

In regard to the integration of education and general studies, the obstacle of existent university organization is again pertinent.

However, without fanciful notions of comprehensive reorganization, certain program reforms might be considered. One would be a degree structure for Education composed of two stages: the first, a general stage, consisting of basic courses in child development, learning theory, social foundations, provincial school organization, and liberal arts--followed by a specialized stage, in which the student chose an educational specialty, that might be elementary teaching or teaching in a special field, but might also be education of the handicapped, international education, vocational education, adult education, educational technology, counselling, philosophy of education, minority group education, etc. (This might require a change in Masters' programs, but not necessarily.) The second model would be one in which the Education program were divided into two basic blocks: one organized approximately as is now the case, but with the professional training component unequivocally strengthened, for preparing teachers; the other devoted to the study of education, for educational specialists other than teachers in the public schools, and leading to Masters' programs in various specialties.

This suggestion is not entirely within the control of any particular group or department in the university, of course. It is more realistic then to deal with ways of increasing the effectiveness of Foundations studies as they are now normally offered in the undergraduate teacher-education programs and at the graduate level. Here again, if there is to be any integration, it must be developed through simultaneous limitation. There is no point in persisting in the delusion that all Foundations field specialists can synthesize their content and method concentrations to communicate anything more than a platitudinous chop-suey of educational ideas. There are, however, certain <u>actual connections</u> between fields, and

especially among scholars concentrating on particular sub-areas in the various fields. While it is impossible here to attempt fine distinctions, the gross distinctions may be applied to undergraduate and graduate capabilities in Foundations. For the undergraduate program in Foundations, the primacy of content should be accepted, and that content should be fundamentally divided into two distinct areas of instruction: one covering educational language, concepts, and theories as such; the other covering the relationship between education and social phenomena. The graduate program, on the other hand, should have a close connection to research, and hence should provide for the association of courses and scholars according to criteria of methodology. This would probably mean a fundamental division between the use of empirical, scientific methods and the use of interpretive, theory-construction methods. It can only be noted here that these divisions are not necessarily coincident; scholars working in one of the gross content areas should not be expected to conform to methodological singularity anymore than they would be expected to apply their research to the same specific topic. Both divisions are suggested tentatively. The important thing is the willingness to discriminate tasks and expertise, without entirely sacrificing those advantages accruing from combined effort. Whatever integration occurs should be achieved through instructional logic and the natural lines of scholarly communication--not through professional compromise within a hazy but comfortable middle ground.

Beyond these somewhat technical matters, the desirability of or claim to integration arises from a unity of beliefs about Foundations studies. Essentially these beliefs are those proper to the university, but having particular ramifications in their application to the study of education. The first of these is a belief in social and intellectual

freedom. To defend this freedom in a modern society is to educate so as to maximize free expression and tolerable diversity within the necessary constraints of public consensus and scientific information. Since all of these terms refer to an intellectual, social, and personal dynamic, this belief must entail continuing criticism of any educational "establishment." "Establishment" here connotes an organization of persons or activities which is justified only by its own existence and is maintained by structural lock-ins which secure it against serious challenge. Establishments tend to develop elites, rigidify structures, reduce choices, and ignore scientific and social changes in their objective to survive. They rest on largely illegitimate claims to authority. They include not only formal organizations, but also informal but closed interlocking economic and intellectual power units which manipulate public opinion and determine public decisions in terms of their own self-interest. They also include temporary "establishments," whose members may gain an institutional or social dominance to such an extent that they may apply normative sanctions in a particular area with such force as to effectively restrict alternative expression or action.[4]

We have a common professional obligation to act in opposition to all of these "establishments," because their justification and support conflicts with our attempts to require educational action based on grounds and evidence open to public scrutiny, and because our critical function disturbs the security built into the structure of a successful establishment.

Just as strong as the resistance against incorporation into established structures of thought and action should be a continuing criticism of fashionably attractive educational whims of the moment. If our accent is on change, it is because of what we can know about social dynamics and

intellectual progress as that applies to the study and conduct of education. It is this knowledge that specifies change requirements, grounds evaluation of change mechanisms and instances, and provides predictive information for educational development. To be carried away by the momentum of educational fashion or to be absorbed into micro-political actions dictated by views of personal gain is to lose the scholarly detachment and wholeness of perspective which are essential to the critical function. The local (and national) setting of education, the politics of educational decision, the popular educational ideas of the day--are all subjects of study. They may furnish points of departure for instruction or data for research, always according to the specifications of the respective disciplines as they have been individually drawn. To allow our tasks to be defined by immediate pressures, however--whether these are imposed by grant agencies, government restrictions, popular political drives, or current public or professional fancies--is to lose our license to address educational issues at all. It is not our professional right to indoctrinate, and it is not within our professional competence to conduct psycho-emotional experiences or to instruct students in such things as the use of drugs, the delights of sex, or the future of the family. Those who would pose as missionaries of the educational profession only destroy the credibility of legitimate efforts in the Foundations fields. What we do, in short, <u>involves</u> immediate social and educational phenomena and their local dimensions, but the work is independent of the particular forms and impositions of these phenomena.

In their most general forms, our common beliefs must include an abiding faith in the efficacy of rational inquiry and critical thought. They must support the intellectual disposition and fortitude to pursue a

search that inevitably results in more uncertainty than certainty, the ability to value both the search in itself and the uncertainty, the capacity to accept that answers are not always discoverable and that some problems are at least for the time being unresolvable--to hold to such a disposition, believing that it yields a productive contribution to education. Finally, we must believe in education as a means of uniting the culture, as it transmits itself through time, with the consciousness of the individual. Such an integration is central in any abstract definition of education. It implies the <u>independence</u> of education from a static culture tradition and also from an anarchic individual interpretation, but its <u>dependence</u> on the culture-person unity which both liberates the personal consciousness and reconstructs the culture in a continuing dynamic of positive development.[5]

## FOOTNOTES

[1]Report of the Harvard Committee, The Graduate Study of Education (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 40.

[2]B. O. Smith, et. al., Teachers for the Real World (Washington, D.C.: The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1969), p. 49.

[3]S. T. Kimball and J. E. McClellan, Education and the New America (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 4.

[4]See John P. Roche, "On Being an Unfashionable Professor," The New York Times Magazine, Oct. 18, 1970.

Also, much of the nationalistic pressure currently applied to Canadian institutions would fall in this category.

[5]For stimulation to these summary thoughts, I am indebted to Israel Scheffler's article, "University Scholarship and the Education of Teachers," in The Teachers College Record, 70.1, October, 1968, to Maxine Greene's remarks on Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed at the AESA 1972 Conference, and to discussions with my colleagues in The Foundations Department at The University of Calgary, particularly to Richard Heyman and Evelina Orteza y Miranda.